

You Left Me Once

By
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“As I watch an aging tree in the dead of winter, it reminds me of you, Preston. Fighting to stand tall after each gust of wind. The weight of snow and ice weakens you, bending your branches a little more. I can’t help but notice a single leaf waving in the wind. It clings dearly after each assault to the life it once had. Eventually, it must let go as do we since the seasons of the past are no more.

I love you, Preston. I always did. I always will.”



It was 6:30 p.m. Running behind a tight schedule, tempers were short, and tension was high. It had been a long, frustrating day on the production set in Miami. The cast and crew had been on the set since five in the morning.

The Absent Girls, a made-for-TV mini-series, was based on a true story about a teenager's kidnapping. A Groupie, Cassandra Stiller had followed Maxwell Sky, a famous rock band, against her parents' wishes. Her father was running for governor when she was found murdered, in Miami Beach back in the late 1980s.

Made-for-TV movies were director Mark Steiner's specialty, and he had made a fortune doing it. Unfortunately, filming this series had been plagued with issues from day one. There have been numerous re-writes and stops to accommodate two-time Academy Award-winning actor Kashmir Rollins's continuous demands. She had worn on Steiner's nerves six years earlier when he cast her in *Mosaic Mermaid*. It had been made for the big screen, costly, and over budget. It turned out to be a box office success, in no small part

due to Kashmir's huge fan base, winning Kashmir her last award.

For this made-for-TV movie, he had brought on board well-known older actors and fresh young faces. He learned this combination was a toxic concoction of acne cream, tampons, PMS, raging hormones, menopause, and Botox.

Now, at 45, Kashmir was far from a young, vivacious actor. She was well seasoned and often hired to play the mother of the young fresh talent. It only fueled her blistering temper and profane language. As a joke, Steiner had given out earplugs on the set, unbeknownst to Kashmir.

Today, Kashmir had worn on *everyone's* nerves. Her mind was elsewhere, causing her to miss her lines as she chewed her nails and snapped at the crew. She complained endlessly about her wardrobe. The thick shoulder pads of her teal polyester blouse were too big, her snug black wig was itching and hot, her feet hurt, her false eyelashes too heavy. What else? Oh, and she needed constant quote-unquote rest breaks, makeup touchups and needing to be fanned, due to the broiling stage lights.

On her mind was the seven o'clock meeting at her lawyer's office, to go over her impending messy divorce from Preston Burke, an Internet shopping mogul. It had eaten away at her all day. Kashmir was determined to get what she was owed, even if she must make everyone around her miserable. And she was damn good at that.

It had not always been like this. Kashmir had been a teenage beauty. In 1982, she landed work acting in commercials and had become known as the *coconut*

suntan oil girl. Soon, she was being paired with Hollywood's sexiest young actors. Part Italian, part Irish, she had the innate ability to morph into any character. Her brilliant alluring smile and charm won her a fan base. It was the agents who saw the other side of her. The spoiled woman stomped her feet and carried on until she got what she wanted and was known to fire and rehire them at will.

At 5'5", with her wavy, lightened, and highlighted hair, shoulder length, and large, almond-shaped, bronze-colored eyes, she had been adorable. Her short perky nose was a gift from Miami plastic surgeon Doc T. Her generous natural lips had unlocked many doors. Acting lessons and a contagious laugh didn't hurt.

Glamour, glitz, and attention were all she had known since then. Sliding out of a limo to cheers, strolling down the red-carpet arm and arm with her leading man. Bright flashes bombarded her from the paparazzi as her fans screamed out, *Kashmir, we love you! Kashmir, I need an autograph!*

That was then, and this was now. The ugly truth? As her fame grew, so did her additions and reckless behavior. When a scene did not go her way, all hell broke loose. And with her attitude and addictions growing out of control, Kashmir knew she was on a reckless highway to hell. Washed up, her beauty fading. Lacking were the days of fine champagne, fat paychecks, and flashing bulbs. Lately, she was lucky if she landed a supporting role in a movie or a made-for-TV film. The Absent Girls was a blessing—a small role but still a gift to keep her busy.